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LMDA New & Noteworthy, May 2019

Katie Welsh

Amanda Dawson

Alonna Ray

Susan Yassky

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LMDA NEW & NOTEWORTHY

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Crossing Borders, Pt. 2: Action in a Time of Division

June 20-22, 2019 Chicago, IL



Chicago, IL is a city of contradictions: one of the most segregated places in the U.S., yet a proud sanctuary city; a site of wealth and privilege juxtaposed with poverty and disinvestment; and a symbol of the greatest community cohesion and some of the worst systemic injustices in the nation.

Crossing Borders, Pt. 2 will host panels, round tables, workshops, and other dynamic conversations about what constitutes “action” for positive social change in a time of crisis; and which illumine how we build pathways to collaboration across imagined and real borders – including, but not limited to, the ones found in our host communities in Chicago.

We hope you can join us in Chicago. Registration is still open! Learn more about the conference and how to register [HERE](#)!



Find the conference schedule on the app [Sched!](#) Download the app today and search for "2019 LMDA Chicago Conference." On the app you can see the full conference schedule and build your own calendar of conference events. You can also connect with conference attendees!

Q&A | Katie Welsh



What is your background as a theater artist?

While growing up, I took voice and piano lessons, performed with choirs, studied dance, and acted in plays and musicals. At Princeton, I continued training as a performer, but I also discovered a passion for performance studies. I concentrated in English, completed a Theater certificate, and took performance and analysis courses; I

also served as a research assistant to theater scholars Stacy Wolf and Jill Dolan. I now perform professionally as a cabaret singer and bring “informative cabarets” to venues. I also continue to conduct scholarly work; I recently co-authored an article on musical theater reception theory with Stacy Wolf. I sometimes refer to myself as a “singer-scholar”!

When and how did you first decide to create your “informative cabarets”? And what is your goal for these performances?

I created my first “informative cabaret” for my senior thesis at Princeton. I wanted to blend performance and scholarship into a single theatrical evening for this final assignment, and I discovered that cabaret was the perfect format since it was inherently a hybrid form incorporating both pattern and performance. After months of research and rehearsals, my first “informative” cabaret, *Women in the World of Sondheim*, was born!

After graduation, I used my thesis show as a model to develop new cabarets; I now have six in repertory. In every show, I share stories about the songs I sing, quote scholars, touch on theater history, and lead moments of musical analysis. By inviting audiences to engage with musical theater in this more analytical way, I believe I am doing my part to honor the music I love, for I am helping to make audiences aware of the complexity behind the catchy melody, the brilliant reasoning behind the vacillating bass line, and the skilled craftsmanship behind the witty lyric. Ultimately, I hope my shows simultaneously entertain, educate, engage and excite audiences.

When selecting pieces for your shows, how do you think dramaturgically about them?

When I am developing a cabaret, I am to myself what a dramaturg is to a playwright or production. Once I have chosen a topic for the show, I begin, as a dramaturg does, by conducting research: I read libretti, compile lists of songs and research their histories and original contexts, and sift through scholarship. It is during this process that I discover the larger trends and themes that I will explore in my cabaret. I always let the research inform



the content and structure of my shows. For instance, while researching the history of Broadway female characters for my show, *The Evolution of the Broadway Musical Heroine*, I noticed several ways in which the heroine's love song changed over time, so I structured the show so that I would proceed chronologically and trace this evolution. Additionally, while conducting research for my show, *New York On Broadway*, I noticed that musicals set in NYC often follow a narrative formula: the lead character arrives in NYC, they lose their way and their love in NYC, and then they finally figure out how to find love and make a life in NYC. So I structured my cabaret to reflect this structure, opening with songs about arriving in the city, moving into songs about the struggle to find love in the city, and closing with songs about thriving in the city.

Additionally, like a dramaturg does with a playwright, I often have to have honest conversations with myself about which songs are necessary to the musical journey and which ones are not; I often have to cut a song or section of patter simply because it is no longer contributing to the whole or is holding up the progress of the evening's narrative. After all, a cabaret needs clear exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution in the same way that any theater piece does. So when I select songs, I think not only about the story each song tells, but also how each song contributes to the larger "story" I'm trying to tell in my show.

Katie Welsh is a singer specializing in musical theater and the Great American Songbook and a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Princeton University. Recent performances include solo concert engagements at Feinstein's/54 Below, Don't Tell Mama, The Duplex, the Metropolitan Room, BroadwayCon, and the Princeton Club of New York. Katie is also a researcher and writer on topics of musical theater and has given interviews to *Everything Sondheim*, *Musical Theater Today*, and *Princeton Echo*. Visit KatieWelsh.com and follow Katie @katiewelshmusic.

(Photo 2: Michael Hull Photography)

Interview by Amanda Dawson

Post-Apprenticeship Reflections:

How We Learned by Doing

by Alonna Ray and Susan Yassky

Every year, Actors Theatre of Louisville gathers a diverse group of about forty early-career theatre practitioners to form its Professional Training Company (PTC), an immersive program that offers practical training in every area of theatre. The PTC has its own full season focused on new work, produced entirely by apprentices. We, Alonna Ray and Susan Yassky, are the 2018-19 Dramaturgy/Literary Management Apprentices at Actors Theatre. As our nine-month apprenticeship comes to a close, we've taken some time to reflect on what we've learned and how we learned it.



We began our time at Actors by diving into the multifaceted nature of dramaturgy, exploring various theories behind the practice. Each week, we met with our literary staff mentors and discussed the many ways in which dramaturgs participate in the creative process. We tackled topics such as season programming, audience engagement, production dramaturgy, and the various ways a dramaturg can support a playwright. We read articles like Suzan-Lori Parks' "Elements of Style" and Elinor Fuchs' "EF's Visit to a Small Planet: Some Questions to Ask a Play," as well as a few juicy LMDA discussion list debates. Through these reading assignments and conversations, we learned how to engage with plays on their own terms, approaching them as unique works of art with specific rules and patterns. Then we put our learning into practice by writing script reports on a wide variety of exciting new plays that the literary staff had encountered, and met regularly to discuss the work. This training sharpened our analytical focus, gave us insight into season selection, and prepared us to enter rehearsal rooms with an inquisitive mindset—ready to take on each project with a spirit of openness and collaboration.

One of the advantages of our training in the PTC is the sheer volume of rehearsal rooms we had access to. Throughout the season, we observed the literary staff in process by serving as

assistant dramaturgs on mainstage and Humana Festival productions. The work of the dramaturg can sometimes be intangible, even to some members of the creative team, which makes it especially hard for an early-career dramaturg to know what good production dramaturgy looks like. Therefore, getting to debrief with our lead dramaturgs after rehearsal about what they were seeing and what questions they had gave us unique insight into the dramaturgical process. We had the opportunity to swap observations and refine our thinking through dialogue, a skill that we could apply to our own work as lead dramaturgs for the PTC season. Watching our mentors navigate challenges and hearing their ideas evolve throughout the rehearsal process created a culture of curiosity, which encouraged us to engage with and learn from the quandaries we encountered, instead of feeling pressure to have all the answers.

Our training consisted of as much theory and observation as it did hands-on dramaturgy, and we worked on an incredible range of projects. From helping to craft a solo piece with a performer-playwright, to working with a commissioned writer to develop a site-specific one-act, to curating an evening of ten-minute plays, we were able to experience first-hand how the role of a dramaturg can change from process to process. Sometimes that has meant making an actor packet or an image board, and sometimes it's meant discussing a playwright's latest draft over coffee, or sitting in the dark during tech and thinking through the many choices that make meaning as a production comes together. We've learned to get comfortable with letting the project dictate the process, and the scope of our experience as dramaturgs has made us more nimble as collaborators.

The ever-changing nature of the dramaturg's role can make it a daunting career path, which makes early-career training extremely important. We're grateful for the mentorship we've received at Actors, and hope that both budding dramaturgs and their mentors will find our insights useful.

The Kennedy Center New Play Dramaturgy Intensive 2019



This was the Year of the 50th Anniversary of the Kennedy Center
American College Theater Festival's Birth!

More details about the fellows!

2019 Kennedy Center Dramaturgy Fellows

(Back row let to right)

Rebecca Weaver, Jacksonville State University

Project: *She Kills Monsters* by Qui Nguyen

Noah Ezell, College of Charleston

Project: *Marisol* by Jose Rivera

Noah is also the 2019 O'Neill Center Conference Fellowship Recipient.

Easton Benson, Central Washington University

Project: *In the Next Room (or The Vibrator Play)* by Sarah Ruhl

Easton is also the 2019 LMDA/ATHE/Kennedy Center Dramaturgy Fellowship Recipient.

Devon Hayakawa, Ball State University

Project: *American Idiot* by Billie Joe Armstrong

These talented dramaturgs receive a one year student membership to LMDA!

Upcoming Regional Events

Make sure to join the Facebook pages of the region(s) in which you live and work. That way, you will receive updated information: <https://lmda.org/map>.

NYC:

Please join us for an LMDA HAPPY HOUR coinciding with the Play On! festival, and celebrating the start of summer.

WHEN: Sunday, June 9th at 5pm

(following the Play On! matinee reading of THE MERCHANT OF VENICE)

WHERE: The Brazen Fox (106 3rd Ave), a few doors down from CSC

TICKETS: Play On! has graciously granted LMDA members a DISCOUNT CODE to purchase \$16 tickets to any festival reading (regularly \$26). To purchase tickets, use the code "LMDA" or simply follow this link: <https://web.ovationtix.com/trs/pr/1000899/prm/LMDA>

Regional questions? Reach out to the VP of Regional Activity Jacqueline Goldfinger (regional@lmda.org).



Your Dramaturgy Ad Here!

We're reserving this high-value newsletter real estate for our Institutional Members. Do you have a job posting you want our readers to see, an M.F.A. program looking for a well-qualified applicant pool, or a festival you want to make sure smart dramaturgs have on their radar? This is the place for it! **Institutional Memberships are only \$200**, and they come with four individual member profiles for your organization to divvy out as you see fit.

Let your organizational leadership know that we'd love them to [join the LMDA party](#).



CALL FOR TRANSLATORS

As we look ahead to #LMDA20 (in Mexico City!), we could use help with a few things - 1) LMDA members who can translate the call for the 2019 and 2020 conference into Spanish/Portuguese, 2) Names/contact information for translators in Mexico City 3) Leads on potential artists to connect with in Mexico and the surrounding area.

Please send any leads to Martine (president@lmda.org).

Interested in contributing to the next newsletter? Have content ideas?

E-mail communications@lmda.org.

Want to keep up with the conversation about the latest in dramaturgical activity?

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